

Summary of Hegel's *Philosophy of Mind*

Paul Trejo, August 1993 For over 180 years students have complained that Hegel's best-known book of philosophy, the PHENOMENOLOGY OF MIND (alias PHENOMENOLOGY OF SPIRIT), is too difficult to read.

A few have tried to summarize Hegel's book, and often their summaries were longer than the original, and just as difficult to read. Today, right here on the INTERNET, I give to you a twelve page summary of this famous book, a book that inspired generations of European philosophers since it first appeared in 1807.

This summary is meant for the beginner in phenomenological philosophy, to encourage more students to struggle with the book for themselves. This book has a colorful history, and is well praised by thinkers as David Strauss, Bruno Bauer, Marx, Engels, Ortega y Gasset, Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, Lacan, Camus, and many more.

I hope some will try again to read this masterpiece. If you do, please find the translation by Miller (1971) and avoid the translation by Baillie (1907).

And watch this space for more exciting Hegelian philosophy, right here on the INTERNET.

Best regards,
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DEFINITION

1. 'Phenomenon' is a word which refers to appearances. It's a Greek word used by Plato to distinguish mere temporal appearances from the eternal Noumena of the Ideal Realm. The student of philosophy should recall Plato's parable of the shadows in the cave, where appearances were taken for realities. Phenomena are appearances. Where is the reality? In Hegel's view, probably unique in Western Philosophy, we can only know Reality when we have completely mastered the appearances, since the appearances (phenomena) partially hide and partially reveal Reality (noumena, Geist) in a peculiar manner.

2. There are degrees of reality within various phenomena. This is the origin of Hegel's idea that there can be degrees of truth in propositions. There are material phenomena and there are mental phenomena. Phenomena of mind also partially hide and partially reveal the truth. The study of phenomena is called, phenomenology, and Hegel focuses on mental phenomena, hence the title, PHENOMENOLOGY OF MIND.

OVERVIEW

1. The PHENOMENOLOGY OF MIND is a study of appearances, images and illusions throughout the history of human consciousness. More specifically, Hegel presents the evolution of consciousness.

2. This is not a chronological history. This is not an account of the evolution of life. The phenomena of mind begins when homo sapiens begins to think.
3. Consciousness goes through many stages. This is a little like the Buddhist theory of the levels of spiritual attainment, from lower forms of consciousness to higher forms of consciousness, but in Classic European format. We don't expect many European philosophers to map a spiritual path, but the detail and rational attitude of Hegel makes his work vastly different from Buddha's. Decide for yourself if Hegel has something important to say.

I. THE INDIVIDUAL

1. Hegel traces the evolution of consciousness from savage and barbaric forms. The first form of consciousness is SENSORY (infantile) CONSCIOUSNESS, a simple 'you seen one thing you seen 'em all' consciousness. Reality impacts the infant, teaching it that different things have different values, and a knowledge of these differences becomes the most valuable possession of all.
2. Experience forces Sensory Consciousness to evolve into PERCEPTUAL CONSCIOUSNESS. Here Aristotle is the guiding light. All things, all animals, all minerals, all places, are carefully recorded and observed and classified in an orderly system of Natural Science. When we look, we now Perceive the natural relationships between objects. We come to grasp cause and effect relations. But there is a gnawing feeling that Natural Science isn't enough. One dimension of Reality continually escapes us, our own minds. How do we classify a mind? How is it constructed, in and for itself?
3. Increased Science transcends Perception and evolves into UNDERSTANDING CONSCIOUSNESS. Here Kant is the guiding light. Kant's theory of the Pure Understanding is the key to this moment. Kant outlined the basic parameters of the human mind, and showed to consciousness its own image of itself. Hegel commemorated Kant's achievement by making it into its own moment in his system. The Understanding Consciousness sees itself as a great unifying principle, where the multiplicity of the world's myriad things are unified under the singleness of the Greater Self (transcendental apperception). The key to logic was uncovered, and it is entirely a mystery why more AI theoreticians don't realize that much of their work was already completed 200 years ago.

II. THE SOCIETY

1. In any case, the Understanding Consciousness also has its limitations. Despite the theory of the Self, Kant's theory remained impersonal, since this Self had no personality. This misses the mark of realism, Hegel thought, and so he traced evolution up one more step, this time to SELF CONSCIOUSNESS. Self Consciousness, beyond mere consciousness of the mind, but attaining Consciousness of a real person, evolved in sub-moments.
2. Here Hegel moves backwards from Kant into ancient times. Self Consciousness evolved long ago

within the domain of politics. Beginning with the DESIRING SELF CONSCIOUSNESS, primitive humans felt strongly only about fulfilling their needs and the needs of their families. Other people were enemies. Fights broke out. In self-interest, people banded in larger groups. Wars broke out. After many centuries, consciousness evolved into two main categories of Self consciousness, MASTERY SELF CONSCIOUSNESS and SERVANT SELF CONSCIOUSNESS.

3. MASTERY SELF CONSCIOUSNESS, the mindframe of the Ruler, brings the demand and the fear to daily life, as a stimulus for progress. But the Master does not progress, otherwise, he wouldn't be the Master! His job is to fight and retain Mastery, never thanking anyone, never deferring to anyone, just retaining this Mastery, without any further development. So, all development belongs to the Servant Class.

4. SERVANT SELF CONSCIOUSNESS not only evolves new technologies and sciences to serve the Master, but also endures its own private hells and torments, so that philosophy itself ferments, and not just technology. The Servant has all the ideas and inventions in the workplace, but at home in his or her hearth, the Servant comes up with philosophical justifications for his or her position.

5. One of the first philosophies the Servant develops is STOIC SELF CONSCIOUSNESS, which is the ideal of honest work and virtue. But reality teaches the children of the Stoic that good is not always rewarded and wickedness not always punished, and hard work is often merely exploited. They develop the SKEPTIC SELF CONSCIOUSNESS, which finds relief only in disbelief, cynicism, resignation to the hard life of a Servant, and a mockery of the tender-hearted.

6. But this cynical view makes life impossible for the children of the Sceptics, yet the temporary truth of skepticism is undeniable. So they take skepticism one step further, and reject the world not only in word but in deed. They develop the UNHAPPY SELF CONSCIOUSNESS, which is Hegel's term for a complex of attitudes. They first retreat from the world entirely, like a monk or an ascetic. They abandon the whole world for prayer, if they believe, or for desperate meditation, if they don't. In any case, the reward is the same. If they attain nothing else from years of ascetic exercise, they attain the joy of having developed their will into an iron will. They attain the truth of Free Will, and see it clearer than anyone else.

7. Free Will suggests the power of the mind and ideas, so IDEALIST CONSCIOUSNESS emerges. Idealism, in contrast to mastery, servitude and asceticism, which all reduce the world to a specific idea, makes ideas themselves, all ideas, into the real.

8. However, Idealism excludes the non-ideal half of reality, so misses the mark of all-inclusiveness. Aiming toward all-inclusiveness with his faith in substance and Nature, Schelling's Transcendental Idealism gave us not a little of our modern scientific faith. This is the beginning of RATIONAL CONSCIOUSNESS.

9. For Schelling, Idealism had to come to terms with Nature, the great Other. The tool for this correction

is **EMPIRICAL CONSCIOUSNESS**, which denies that reason is in the subject, reflected out to the world. It believes reason is entirely in the object, only dimly reflected by the inner mind. By Empirical observation, we should arrive at the ultimate in reason, so it is claimed.

10. With Empirical consciousness, thought systematically controls itself using experimentation and statistics. Even life itself becomes an object of science within biology. Empirical Psychology is provided to study the human mind.

11. But Psychology is always more or less stuck at the level of animal psychology. Because Empirical consciousness seeks absolute objectivity, for that very reason the study of the subjective Self is considered beyond scientific investigation. Empirical psychology is thus just as one-sided as the subjectivism it avoids. When the mind is studied by this method, it is studied as a mind-as-object, as bodily behavior, as brain tissue, or (as in Hegel's day) as bumps on the skull.

12. A Self consciousness which views itself as a deterministic knee-jerk of animal reflexes necessarily negates its own Self certainty, since it sees its own reality outside itself.

13. Do behaviorists understand their own behavior of analysing the behavior of others? Do they really only experience themselves as reflexes of limbs and tongue? This is the phenomenological reply to B F Skinner's challenge to the dignity of self consciousness.

14. This doesn't mean that the existentialist is right, that we are totally free, and all our choices are arbitrary. It will not do to abandon one extreme for the other. We are not mere bone and mere conditioned reflexes. But neither are we mere subjectivity, unrelated to natural conditions. We are supine to a certain degree (accent 'degree') of conditionability and determinism. Half of our truth is freedom, the other half is that our 'reality is a bone.'

15. Discovering the natural limits of Empirical consciousness, we arrive at a more holistic vision. We break out of the passivity of mere observation. Our subjectivity is just as valid as our objectivity, so Empirical psychology is not the final understanding of people.

16. When we objectify our subjectivity, then we transform theory into practice. As objective subjects we are no longer isolated individuals. As concrete selves in a concrete society, we share ideas. We already knew that, since we have always shared local morality since infancy. So, we rise from the chaos and boredom of Empirical Self Consciousness towards **ETHICAL SELF CONSCIOUSNESS**.

16a. Ethical consciousness begins with the immediate fact of a family, without which a Self does not exist. A child leaves home and often marries, where male and female, both antithetic, join in synthetic union, and produce offspring to carry on the family estate. Where the female is the domain of Divine Law and the male is the domain of Human Law, the synthesis is a practical ethic which expands to include the whole community. A family participates in the social economy, where honesty, thrift and reliability are highly valued virtues.

17. In this realm, the literature of heroism best portrays our self image. Practical affairs are easily exaggerated in literature, so the good guy is entirely good and the bad guy is entirely bad, making choices simple and partisanship palatable. But conscience can become arrested at the level of fiction.
18. People of conscience strive for social harmony, sometimes to the extreme of puritanism. They are often highly valued, but sometimes they go too far and try to guide the world towards pettiness. Virtue should also be aware of the ways of the world, and live comfortably within the world with tolerance and forgiveness.
19. The weakness of Ethical Consciousness is that it sometimes opposes worldliness to the extreme of moral arrogance. It harshly judges the joyful person who interacts with the world, who engages the world in a game of skill and competence which gives meaning to the world. It turns its back on the heroic soldier because of minor infractions.
20. Law is the institution which regulates our impositions upon each other. Even people of conscience sometimes have to learn that others have rights, too. So we arrive at **LEGAL SELF CONSCIOUSNESS**.
21. The Law is necessary, and whoever sees that it is not arbitrary nor imposed from above person is more at home in society. The rationale of Law lies in its social, Objective will, its relative universality, that is, on natural Democracy.
22. Those who don't see this imagine that Laws were invented at some point by powerful men who invented the Law for their own convenience. This is naive, since there has never been a time, from prehistoric days to the present, when Law did not exist.
23. By understanding the System of Law, the social person with desire on one hand and respect on the other arrives at a **SPIRITUAL CONSCIOUSNESS**, that is, understands Spirit is Objective.
24. With objective spirit we arrive at explicit self-consciousness. Before this, we experience only a greater or lesser implicit self-consciousness. Now the individual realizes self-consciousness is not merely individual, but social, and with this realization achieves awareness of social responsibility.

II-A. SOCIETY AND CULTURE

1. Objective spirit is another word for my local culture. In Hegel's words, it is the 'I that is a We, and the We that is an I.'
2. Individuals in a system of economic relations presuppose a culture, an objective spirit. When I open my infant eyes, I see my people already moving in some social relation to productivity and industry, as owners or employees. I am born in a social relation.

3. My local culture begins with my natal family. My first lesson is a tragedy. I want to be loyal, but there are conflicting claims on my loyalty. Feminine values and masculine values often clash, and the hearth can clash with the worldly call. This is **TRAGIC CONSCIOUSNESS**. Tragedy implies both duty and guilt, and has no age limit. Should we testify against our family members? A soldier who dutifully goes to war betrays his sick old mother at home, but the son who remains to care for her knows he betrays his comrades in arms. There can be no victory in tragedy.
4. Tragedy is first crystallized in literature in ancient Roman culture. The legal person of the Roman legal system evolved into the hero of Roman literature. Freed from tradition, the legal person is a liberation which rests upon sharing the freedom of the Head of State.
5. The Head of State is surrounded by courtiers and cultured elite. To be invited into this company requires the utmost discipline in courtesy, education and achievement. Only self sacrifice, strenuous effort, in Hegel's word, alienation, can become cultured. Only a few can attain **ALIENATION CONSCIOUSNESS**.
6. Obviously, Hegel's definition of alienation is different from Marx' definition, the alienation of the worker from the means of production. For Hegel, alienation is the extra work needed to raise an average person to a high level of culture. But culture, to the average person, seems remote and unreachable, hovering over and humiliating the average person.
7. Those who pass through the fire of alienation rise to the cultured class, as opposed to the average class. A new class rises to bridge the gap between the two classes, the professional class of advisors, doctors, educators and so on, to meet the average class half way.
8. Given this stratification, language develops in two broad directions, up and down. Flattery, a talking up to people of presumably more culture, and arrogance, a talking down to people of presumably less, develop to the level of arts.
9. Those who are neither average nor part of the cultural elite develop their own realm, the **LACERATED CONSCIOUSNESS** of the bohemian. These social critics, these talented drop-outs, possess a wit which sometimes achieves art. The bohemian poet uses the tools of culture against culture. Where the state is rational, the bohemian toys with the irrational. Where the state is irrational, the bohemian is quick to be rational. Joining domestic morality and working class morality, the bohemian reminds the State of its evident failures.
10. The bohemian, the irreverent rationalist, violently argues with the pious conservative. Alienation and guilt are too expensive, claims the bohemian, who then brings on the Age of Enlightenment, the struggle between faith and intellect, well represented by the French Revolution.
11. The Enlightenment demands freedom of reason, freedom to disbelieve in ghosts and goblins, freedom from foolishness and even State foolishness. All else is superstition and should be rejected for the good

of all. Its goal is revolutionary, that human reason must win dominance over all nature and all worldly power.

12. In the optimistic utopia of the Enlightenment, people are basically perfect, but the systems of church and state frustrate our basic perfection. Destruction of the state and the achievement of anarchy should result in utopia, because our presumed basic goodness would be free to emerge.

13. The French Revolution won. The church and state were destroyed by force and guillotine. Anarchy prevailed. But utopia did not come, rather, organized crime emerged like a wildfire, murder spread across the city and terrorism ruled the countryside. There was a Reign of Terror. What was the miscalculation? The Enlightenment was naive in thinking that mere Utilitarianism, combined with a social contract would bring Utopia. It didn't work. Something unforeseen was lost when the Institutions were razed to the ground.

14. In retrospect, it is now clear that religion is far more complicated, far richer in history, far deeper in psychology than a mere trick of priests. Guilt goes far deeper than the doctrine of original sin, since we never fulfill our full potential, so a certain degree of existential guilt is inevitable, irregardless of priestcraft. Also, social stratification is far more complex and profound than a mere trick of rulers to attain wealth and power. The Reign of Terror taught the Enlightenment a costly lesson.

15. Thousands of years of human history lay behind the Institutions of Church and State, and instead of trying to understand the real reasons for their existence, their real nature, the Enlightenment opted for the easy, flippant answer. The literature of church and state does not include a literature of depth psychology and sociology. They themselves do not know why they exist, and they are honest enough to call their existence a great mystery. A truly scientific mind would begin here.

16. Napoleon brought the Reformation, resolved the Terror and calmed the Enlightenment. A compromise was struck which remains with us today. Religion will survive, but it must now take into account the claims of the Enlightenment. Religion must acknowledge theological critique, textual analysis, historical method and archeological reason. In return, the Enlightenment must recognize the important role religion can play in sociological research, analysis of the human condition and social programs.

17. Ultimately, religion and Enlightenment do agree on at least one axiom, that DUTY CONSCIOUSNESS is vital to human affairs in any dimension. The post-Enlightenment joins hands with religion to celebrate Duty consciousness. With the idea of duty we first attain complete self certainty, because real duty is never alien to me, but is a perfect mirror of my own inner face.

18. My self certainty and sense of duty are joined by my free will, and combine to support my FREEDOM CONSCIOUSNESS. I will stake my own life on the politics of freedom for me and my community. But Duty can clash with Freedom. Duty would control everything if it could. Freedom does not want to be controlled. There is spirit and there is flesh. They are both in me, and it is a tragedy that

they should war within my breast.

19. If I achieve a balance between freedom and social responsibility, this is a great victory. It is greatest for the most responsible individual within the freest State. This person often becomes the leader of the State. In this person, Duty and Freedom become open to all, the cultured elite and the average person. With a liberal Church and a free Republic, we define the inalienable rights of all in a sacred Bill of Rights.

20. Even with all this, all is not perfect. The problem of evil, crime, never goes away. After centuries of attempts, our most successful adaptation to the dark side of our own human nature is finally, ultimately, a **FORGIVING CONSCIOUSNESS**. In Forgiveness, duty and nature can coexist on almost any level.

21. All morality, ethics, law and politics finally come to this, that we established a Republic of Freedom and a Bill of Rights, and then victoriously returned to a life of Forgiving consciousness, realizing that we can reasonably do little more than improve upon these basics that we have won with so much struggle.

III. THE CHURCH

1. With this discovery, obviously, we have deduced the **RELIGIOUS CONSCIOUSNESS**. At this point, Hegel again takes us backwards in history to fully develop this theme. Even though humanity arrives at our common Religious Consciousness as late as the Middle Ages, still, there were pockets of advanced thinking long before the Middle Ages. Hegel goes back to very ancient times to begin.

2. He begins his analysis with **NATURAL RELIGIOUS CONSCIOUSNESS**, meaning the first stirrings of religiosity within minds which saw Nature as God, or as a series of gods. Ancient people worshipped Nature as the sun, the moon, the stars, the volcanoes, the animals, and so on. There are today many religions which still insist upon a minimum reverence to certain animals and/or elements in their rites.

3. As people evolve, however, humans are found more wonderful than animals, and the Sun is found to be more indifferent to human affairs than was hoped. Piety moves on. What is truly sacred, it was concluded, are sacred people and their sacred activities. Religion was sought in great works of human hands, especially the Temple itself, and in the science of architecture which created it. Also, the Temple arts, like sculpture and painting (idolatry), music, dance, theater and amazing culinary delights; these became the seeds of a new development, the **ARTISTIC RELIGIOUS CONSCIOUSNESS**. Those who are familiar with the history of art know that Art and the Church coincide in many points.

4. For Hegel, as for Aristotle, there is a hierarchy of the Arts, where music and literature play the highest roles, because of their close resemblance with consciousness itself. Literature reveals the Word itself, the thought, the idea, exquisitely, subtly, over the long period of time of reading. Not just ideas, but clear ideas, personalities, relationships, conflicts, and even sacred conflicts and sacred ideas, over the medium of literature. It is through this medium, sacred literature, that humanity discovers the highest religious consciousness, the **REVEALED RELIGION CONSCIOUSNESS**. In this moment of consciousness,

beyond natural religion, beyond artistic religion, the Word is uppermost, Morality is uppermost, Love is uppermost, with its promise of harmony, resolution, synthesis, cooperation and a positive feeling far beyond peaceful coexistence.

IV. THE PHILOSOPHER

1. With this last stage in evolution, one might think Hegel would complete his study, since Christianity, the apex of Revealed Religion by its own self-opinion, has been deduced and that is that.
2. But this is the point where Hegel confused his followers, and split them into Left and Right wings. Hegel saw an even higher consciousness than Revealed Religion Consciousness, and so, to some extent, transcended religion, which convinced some novices that he was an atheist, and convinced others that he had a higher vision of Christ than the average minister.
3. This is how it goes. Religion seeks the Highest of the High, but its methods are not the highest. Religion is burdened by its method which it retains from the Arts, namely, imagery.
4. Religion is steeped in imagery, in images, in pictures, and so works very well with mythology, portraits and theater. This is helpful in reaching the masses, the young and the old, but it is not as precise as concrete thinking.
5. When one seeks the precision and clarity of concrete ideas, one transcends the methodology of religion, and so on attains to the SPIRITUAL CONSCIOUSNESS, or perhaps, GEIST CONSCIOUSNESS.
6. SPIRIT in this context is not mystical or religious in the Sunday School sense. We talk freely of School Spirit, or Community Spirit, or Team Spirit, and that is all that Hegel means by this term. Spirit is an invisible reality which is all-important in social organizations, and is probably best represented by the leader of the social group. It is very subjective, even intra-subjective, but it is also objective, precisely because it is shared by many. It is the synthesis of the subjective and the objective, the self-contained resolution of both, and so is closer to any definition of the absolute than we have yet approached.
7. Now, to become aware of Spirit is to have climbed the heights of human consciousness, to have achieved the philosophy of virtue, asceticism and reason, to have become a leader in one's society on the basis of virtue, to have achieved morality, that is, love of society and a willingness to serve (all the things Ayn Rand would call altruism and would condemn), and to appreciate the power of this invisible force called Community Spirit.
8. But it is one thing to have community spirit, and quite another thing to be excellent at it. To be excellent, one must be able to communicate to others the details of one's consciousness, and explain to children the reasons for State decisions. One has to be more than an example at this level. To be a superior social leader one must also be able to explain one's actions and motives and visions in detail, yet

in simple terms. To do this one must once again rise to a higher level of consciousness, the **PHILOSOPHICAL CONSCIOUSNESS**.

9. One may object that the Stoic and the Skeptic were also philosophers, and they are set much lower on his list. Hegel's answer is that the Stoics and Sceptics were mainly interested in explaining their own self consciousness. The religious consciousness is higher precisely because it focuses on the entire society with a certain tenderness and wisdom, tolerance and social understanding. Philosophical consciousness builds upon this social leadership only by providing its intellectual component. And when the love of the religious consciousness joins the analysis of the philosophical consciousness, the highest consciousness, **ABSOLUTE CONSCIOUSNESS**, is the shining result.

10. With Absolute Consciousness one may approach heaven. Love, Harmony, Wisdom, Social responsibility, experience, all converge in one consciousness, where one can glimpse the End of Time, meaning, the dimension beyond mere appearances, the dimension beyond phenomena. The goal of the Phenomenology is reached, then, in the transcendence of phenomena and the attainment of Noumena, Geist, Spirit, the Absolute. And what is that Absolute? It's conscious Love.

11. How is it experienced? As the End of Time. Well, then, does the person who experiences the End of Time simply die? No. The vision involves turning around and looking again at all the phenomena of human history, there in front of one's eyes, and witnessing humanity coming up behind one, rising toward the same vision, this one closer, this one farther away, all converging toward one vision, the vision of God, of Universal Harmony, of the Absolute, the highest possible satisfaction. Then one sees the absolute truth--the world of phenomena doesn't disappear when one transcends it, but it keeps right on going.

12. Absolute Consciousness does not negate phenomena, rather, it *assimilates* phenomena, and so co-exists peacefully with it. It only brings to its members the social responsibility that comes with Wisdom. One must now learn to love the entire world, and to help each person one meets along to their next stage of consciousness.